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ABSTRACT

Project English--a federally-funded research and development project in English education--existed from 1961 to 1968. Conceived in a frantic era of educational reform, Project English was designed to focus on research. Following an initial planning conference, the first curriculum study centers were funded, and areas of research were suggested. Among the types of activities funded by the project were study centers to develop and field-test sequential curricula, demonstration centers, centers for teacher preparation, and small contract research projects. The materials prepared at the four most productive study centers (at Carnegie-Mellon, Hunter College, and the Universities of Nebraska and Oregon) attempted to define English, to deal with extended sequences of instruction, and to model inductive teaching. The death of Project English was due to attacks from within the profession, the lack of credibility of the educational system in the late 1960s, and the fact that its efforts were largely unknown to English teachers. However, Project English was of value not only to its participants, but to classroom teachers and students of curriculum and educational history. Not only did it make available innovative methods and materials, but its existence posed basic questions about the nature of knowledge and learning. (GT)

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PROJECT ENGLISH (1961-1968)

Conception--Birth--Life--Death--and Who Cared?

by

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PROJECT ENGLISH (1961-1968)

Conception--Birth--Life--Death--and Who Cared?

I had never heard of Project English until one afternoon in 1970. I was working on a paper for a pre-doctoral seminar, and I came across its reference in a journal article. It began in 1961, it ended in 1968. Between these years, the federal government had given close to four million dollars to support research and development in English education at 23 centers throughout the United States and to support many "small contract" research projects. Close to one-half million pages of material was still available in published and unpublished form. Why hadn't I, a teacher with eleven years experience and head of an English department, ever heard of Project English?

Further conversations with colleagues made me feel less ignorant. Those who knew about Project English tended to have either university affiliation or personal acquaintance with Project English participants. Those who, like me, hadn't heard of it, tended to be classroom teachers who "just taught" during the seven years of its existence.

Unlike Project English other components of the "English Program of USOE," such as NDEA and ESEA, were old friends. NDEA had funded a summer institute I had attended in 1965. Money from ESEA had built a communications center at my high school in 1966. I had even heard about the National Endowment for the Humanities. But summer institutes, reading labs, and endowment funds touched my life and the lives of teachers I knew. Somehow, Project English didn't have the same impact, or at least we weren't aware of the impact.

Curiosity about Project English urged me toward additional reading. Surprisingly, I found I did, in fact, recognize a few names and titles. Francis Christensen's generative rhetoric--I'd been using it in the classroom since 1965. Marjorie Smiley's Gateway English--teachers in my department had ordered it for the reading labs. I'd heard about certain "grammar" exercises that improved student writing. I may have even seen a volume from the "Oregon Curriculum" at Central Office. What I didn't know was that Project English had made those methods and materials possible.

Why did Project English, a program that produced so much activity between 1961 and 1968, have so little effect on classroom teachers, at least the ones I knew? An examination of the atmosphere of urgency in which Project English was conceived, the legal constraints effecting its birth, the scholarly commitment that perpetuated its life, and the climate of doubt at the time of its death will show that Project English may have been prevented at the outset from making even tangential contact with the masses of English teachers.

Conception: A Time of Urgency

Project English was conceived in a frantic aura of educational reform that even preceded Sputnik. Many of those urging extreme reform touted "educational excellence" and scholarship, while denigrating John Dewey and life adjustment education. However, moderate reformers advocated a communion of scholars and "educationists" to upgrade what was preceived to be a deteriorating curriculum. Early in 1955, George Winchester Stone from MLA and J. N. Hook from NCTE began planning national discussions about the "deplorable" state of English instruction. In 1957, Ford Foundation money

made possible the resulting "Basic Issues" Conferences in 1958, the year NDEA made available money for science, mathematics, foreign language--but not English. The 1959 Woods Hole Conference, though focusing on science education, offered indirectly a possible solution for the ailing English language arts--a spiral curriculum. In 1960, at NCTE's Golden Anniversary meeting, a resolution was passed expressing the organization's intention to pressure Congress to extend NDEA to English. Acting on the resolution, NCTE commissioned a report documenting a shortage of qualified English teachers and the inadequate preparation for those teachers currently in the field. The National Interest and the Teaching of English was published early in 1961 and placed in the hands of each Congressman prior to the vote on the 1961 revision of NDEA. It didn't work. English was, again, excluded from the NDEA funding it wouldn't receive until the 1964 revision of the law.

However, in April, 1961, Sterling M. McMurrin, then the U. S. Commissioner of Education, realizing the implications of The National Interest, testified before a senate appropriations hearing that instruction in reading and in written and oral communication was a matter of national importance. Congress, in September of 1961, authorized a limited amount of money for the improvement of English instruction under Public Law 531, administered by the Cooperative Research Branch. This money seeded Project English. The seed shaped the Project and at the same time the Project's fate.

Birth: A Time of Constraint

In the 1950's federal aid to education was not only uncommon, but its benignity was also a hotly debated issue in schools of education throughout the nation. Since the Constitution excludes any direct reference to educa-

tion, the federal government has traditionally governed only those schools operated on federal property. Occasional assistance, such as free lunch programs, was justified under the "general welfare" provisions in the Constitution. But Sputnik's launching precipitated national concern over "defense," another constitutional provision that enabled the federal government to become involved in education on a grand scale.

As English educators saw large sums of money appropriated for science, mathematics, and foreign language in the interest of national defense, "Why not me?" became a predictable issue. Having been overlooked in 1958 and again in 1961, the English profession was ready to use Public Law 531 as an expedient alternative to NDEA.

Public Law 531, passed in 1954, permitted the Commissioner of Education to enter into "cooperative arrangements" with colleges, universities and state educational institutions for the purposes of research, surveys and demonstrations. The Law was significant, not because of the modest funds it dispensed, but rather that it established the precedent of federally funded and controlled educational research. It was the very nature of Public Law 531 that gave shape to subsequent Project English programs. Specifically, projects had to focus on research; projects had to be administered by a university, college or state department of education. Subsequent criticism of Project English as being too academic and out of touch with reality may have resulted from the restrictions on Project English, imposed by the letter of the law.

The first issue of Project English Newsletter (May, 1962) indicates that from October through December of 1961, a number of preliminary meetings and announcements at professional meetings took place. The first announce-

ment of Project English was published in the November-December issue of School Life. Proposals for research were to be sent to USOE and subsequently submitted to two committees: first, a panel of English specialists (in 1961, these were Theodor Clymer, Robert Pooley, and Albert Kitzhaber) and second, an advisory committee of experts appointed outside USOE by the Commissioner of Education. Centers would soon be established at selected universities for the development of new instructional materials and methods. The project was to be supervised by Ralph C. M. Flint, director of the division of Statistics and Research Services.

Activity followed the School Life report. In January, 1962, J. N. Hook, on leave from the University of Illinois, became coordinator of Project English. There was subsequently a national conference in Washington D.C. to discuss plans for Project English. Letters of support bombarded Washington, including some from 20 state departments of education and 100 chairmen of college and university departments of English.

During March and April of 1962, the first curriculum study centers were selected. Out of 23 proposals, the research Advisory Committee approved three:

Institution	(was awarded) Amount	(to spend in) Years of Contract
University of Nebraska	$250,000	5
Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie-Mellon)	$220,000	4 (plus)
Northwestern University	$250,000	5

Following the funding of the first three centers, a conference was held at Carnegie Institute of Technology to discuss needed research in the teaching of English. Four areas of research were suggested:

1. Sequence of curriculum from the standpoints of content and individual differences in learning ability
2. Interrelationships among various parts of content, e.g., relationship of linguistic knowledge to reading, literature and composition
3. Longitudinal investigations of how ability to speak, read, and write develops
4. Relationship of logic and the reasoning process to composition and the reading of literary and non-literary materials.

These four areas became the focus for how the conditions of PL 531 would be fulfilled. Garlie Forehand (University of Chicago) and W. J. McKeachie (University of Michigan) provided guidance in statistical methodology and research design for those participants whose humanistic training traditionally had lacked such analytic focus.

Life: A Time of Scholarly Commitment

Universities, scholars, and researchers appeared to be the leaders in the Project English movement, although teachers and students were used in the preparation and pilot testing of methods and materials. Grants increased from $600,000 in 1962, to $900,000 in 1963, to $2,000,000 in 1964. By 1967, there were countless "small-contract" projects and 23 Centers producing enough material to fill a 16-page bibliography.

Several types of scholarly activity under "Project English" dramatize the Project's scope.

A. Study Centers tended to develop and field-test sequential curricula.

For example, the Northwestern Center (Jean H. Hagstrum, Stephen Dunning, Wallace Douglas) developed a composition curriculum, grades 7-12. Teachers College, Columbia University Center (Gerald Dykstra and Charlotte Kuenstler) developed ESL materials for children ages 5-8. The Indiana Center (Edward B. Jenkinson) sought to develop three separate courses of study in English for seventh through twelfth grade youngsters of varying abilities. The Minnesota Center (Stanley B. Kegler) developed thirty-one teaching units on language, grades 7 through 12. The Wisconsin Center (Robert C. Pooley) field-tested 600 pages of curriculum materials on more than 8,000 elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators who volunteered to work through the center.

B. Demonstration Centers concentrated, not on the exclusive development and testing of materials, but on demonstration teaching. The Syracuse University Center (William Sheldon) produced 16-mm films on the teaching of reading to secondary school students, films that became the basis for an inservice program. The center at Euclid Central Junior High School (George Hillocks, Jr., Michael Flanigan, Charles Rogers) conducted a demonstration program on how to interrelate the teaching of language, literature, and composition on a schoolwide basis, grades 7-9, all ability levels. Euclid, by restriction of PL 531, worked jointly with Western Reserve University.

C. Centers for Teacher Preparation focused on developing policy statements to guide institutions in the preparation of English teachers. The Illinois State-Wide Curriculum Study Center in the Preparation of Secondary School English Teachers (ISCPET) directed by J. N. Hook, developed a "Qualifications Statement for Teachers" and 41 volumes about research into the nature of teacher personality and student response. Western Michigan

University worked with NCTE, MLA and the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification to develop Guidelines for the Preparation of 66 Teachers of English.

D. Unlike the large amounts of money given to the Centers, small contract projects were restricted to $7500. For example, James Squire studied the programs of selected high schools consistently educating outstanding English students. Edward R. Hill analyzed 16,000 specimens of student writing grades 4-6 to test the hypothesis that language development is on a continuum of growth. Roy O'Donnell researched the effect of the study of syntactic relationships on student writing. Dwight Burton conducted studies on the relationship of frequency of writing, correction, and learning to write. Donald Bateman and Frank Zidonis studied the relationship of grammatical structure to writing.

Even a cursory glance at the sample of Centers and researchers cited above highlights the intense amount of scholarly activity in English education that was going on between 1962 and 1968 because of Public Law 531.

Focus: Four Centers

Four Student Centers, however, are worthy of special mention: Nebraska, Carnegie-Mellon, Oregon, and Hunter College. These centers were, by far, the most productive, in terms of volume. They produced 256 volumes, representing over 20,000 pages of curriculum materials. In fact, over one-third of the NCTE/ERIC catalog for 1969--54 pages out of 132--is devoted to the listing of materials for these four centers. In addition, the materials at these Centers were subsequently published as textbooks or curriculum guides and widely disseminated. The Nebraska materials were published by the University

of Nebraska Press; the Carnegie-Mellon materials, by Noble and Noble; the Oregon curriculum, by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston; and the Hunter "Gateway" materials, by MacMillan. Like the other centers, these four attempted to reach a broad student audience.

The four centers were among the first six to be approved by USOE. Nebraska and Carnegie-Mellon were the first two Centers to be funded. Later, the Oregon Center was awarded $250,000 for a five-year contract; and Hunter College, $249,802 for a five-year contract. In effect, these four Centers began and completed their work at approximately the same time. At the completion of the federal contracts, the materials could be "freed" for commercial publication.

A. The Center Directors

The directors of the four centers held Ph.D. degrees in English; three held teaching positions in English departments. Paul Olson at the University of Nebraska submitted the only proposal, according to Michael Shugrue, to receive unanimous approval by the federal appraisers. Erwin Steinberg, Professor of English, former Dean of Margaret Morrison College of Liberal Arts, former Dean of College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Carnegie, not only submitted the second proposal to be funded, but also directed the Carnegie Conference on research in 1962. Albert Kitzhaber, University of Oregon, had, between 1958 and 1960, directed a study in Portland under a grant from the Ford Foundation purportedly one of the first efforts to reassess high school education after Sputnik. Marjorie Smiley, with the Department of Education at Hunter College, submitted the proposal for "Gateway" English, the only project of the four that focused on the

culturally different, alienated student. None of the four directors had attended the Conference on the Basic Issues; none had been involved in the Committee on the National Interest. Olson and Steinberg had attended the Carnegie Conference on research; Olson and Kitzhaber later participated at the Dartmouth Conference in 1966.

B. The Materials

The materials prepared at these four centers shared three features: (1) they attempted to define English, (2) they attempted to deal with extended sequences of instruction, and (3) they attempted to model "inductive teaching."

1. Definition of English

All four centers interpreted English to be an integrated discipline. The Nebraska program concentrated on composition, but three of its seven areas of concentration dealt with discourse analysis, structural and transformational grammar, and close reading of literature. Integration is implicit in the following suggested activities. In grade 1, pupils are introduced to folk literature, asked to study language patterns peculiar to these forms, and encouraged to dramatize scenes and compose stories based on their experiences with folk literature. By grade 10, this total integration is not so pronounced. Students are directed to read The Pearl, write compositions about it, and perform language exercises aimed at developing their writing.

The Carnegie program focused on literature, but approximately 40 per cent of the curriculum was devoted to composition and language activities. A teacher's guide for the tenth-year program, for example, devoted 165

pages primarily to discussion questions about the literature and only 22 pages to writing and related skills.

Unlike Nebraska and Carnegie, the Oregon materials clustered around three separate strands, treated with equal emphasis. The language program was based on transformational theory in grammar, supplemented by sub-strands in such aspects as linguistic history, etymology and semantics. The composition program emphasized substance, structure, and style. The literature program stressed subject (narration, topic, theme), form (verbal and artistic structuring of ideas), and point of view (locutionary stance of narrator and attitude toward subject).

Unlike the other three centers, the Hunter Center produced materials that defined English a bit more broadly than language, literature, and composition (the triad of content affirmed at the Basic Issues Conferences). The Hunter materials focused on high-interest reading materials for "disadvantaged adolescents," language activities focusing on personal experience, and a writing skills program that tended to be functional, rather than prescriptive. Terms such as "meaningful," "own experience," and "ideas they wish to discuss" suggest that "Gateway" was far more student-centered, for want of a better term, than the other three programs, which appear to be content-centered.

2. Curriculum Sequence

All four centers attempted to adapt Bruner's spiral curriculum to English. The Nebraska, kindergarten through college, program includes a developmental literature program based on recurring themes in literature. For instance, primary school children read Aesop's Fables, junior high

school students read Beowulf, and high school students read Dr. Faustus--under the basic theme myths and heroes. The spiral curriculum of Carnegie focused on universal Concerns of Man. In grade ten, students read The Iliad, The Story of Moses, Julius Caesar, and Master and Man--focusing on heroism. In Grade 11, the focus is on how universal concerns are modified by cultural patterns (e.g., the Puritan Attitude, Idealism, and American Social Conscience). In grade 12, universal concerns are shown as part of the literary artist's technique. The three-strand Oregon program is also spiraled, in what the staff refers to as a "helpful" rather than an "absolute" sequence. In the language program, a complete grammar is presented each year, grades 7-12, in growing complexity. The composition program and the literature program each stress three major concepts, treated in growing complexity from grade 7 to grade 12. In the Hunter project, certain motifs are stressed throughout the junior high school program: the nature of regional and social class differences in the United States and the necessity of communication. The thematic units are sequenced to "spiral" outward from the student. For instance, grade 7 materials include units on the family, self-awareness, and coping. Grade 8 materials have broader social and historical themes, such as "Two Roads to Greatness," two views of American history from Frederick Doguals and Abraham Lincoln. Grade 9 materials concentrate on ethics and social protest.

3. Inductive Teaching

"Inductive Method" is an amorphous concept, in the sense that one can define it to personal advantage. A narrow definition conotes a teacher's almost Socratic determination to get a student to arrive at a pre-determined

insight. A broader definition equates inductive method with discovery learning. This latter definition was Bruner's, although Bruner felt that students could, in a learning situation, discover existing knowledge. Nevertheless, inductive method was present, in some form, in the materials of the four centers. Nebraska: After primary school children were introduced to Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are, they discussed questions which lead to convergent discoveries: e.g., "Do you think this is a true story?" "Do forests really grow in your bedroom?" "Did you ever want to sail away on a boat?" Carnegie: High school students reading "Return: Two Poems" are asked these questions: "In what spirit does the writer return to his native Africa?" "What one line best expresses his spirit?" "Where do you suppose the writer has been and why?" Oregon: After students read "The Great Mountains" from The Red Pony, they answer these questions: "What is the concrete subject?" "What is the abstract subject?" "Stories contain conflict. Is there any conflict here? If so, what? In what way is it related to the story as a whole? Is it finally resolved?" In language exercises, students examine ten groups of words that are scrambled and unscramble them, prior to discussing grammatical sequence as a concept. Hunter: These materials stressed thinking skills, such as drawing inferences, gathering evidence, appraising truth and falseness. One thing is clear: None of the four centers defined induction as open-ended inquiry.

So far the discussion of the four centers has emphasized product. But what about process? One of the characteristic features of the four Project English Centers was the involvement of large numbers of professors, teachers, public school students, public school administrators, college undergraduate and graduate students, psychological and statistical resource people. For

instance, the Nebraska Center used 20 teachers in 1961 and 44 teachers in 1962 to prepare its initial 82 units. Then, five different types of school systems tested the materials and provided feedback for revision. At Carnegie-Mellon University, a testing program to evaluate the materials was developed and tested on 465 students assigned to experimental and control groups. The Oregon project trained 150 teachers to pilot test experimental materials on some 50,000 students in seven school districts in Oregon and Washington. The "author's acknowledgements" pages of Kitzhaber's Language/Rhetoric I includes 27 people mentioned by name and close to 200 people mentioned by title. With regard to the Hunter College Center, Marjorie Smiley gives acknowledgment to 17 junior high school teachers who helped test the materials, to 12 administrators and supervisors from New York City, Dade County, Miami and San Diego and to hundreds of students who used the materials. There was involvement.

Death: A Time of Doubt

By 1968, the four-million dollar federal investment in English through Public Law 531 had bought a seven-year period of intense research and development, possibly the basis for a national curriculum. However, a curriculum that was devised by scholars and researchers, that carried the academic authority inherent in the spiral curriculum and inductive teaching, that defined English as content carried the burden of proof. First, it had to surmount attacks from within the profession. Second, it had to appear palatable to an educational system whose credibility in the late 1960s, was being severely questioned. Third, having overcome the first two obstacles, it had to make itself known to the masses of English teachers who lived within the confines of their classroom walls. Unable to combat

these three obstacles, Project English started to die, even before its last contract expired in 1968.

Attacks from Within the Profession

The death of Project English wasn't sudden. Hints of perceived terminal illness emerged as the profession began to ask penetrating questions.

In 1965, George C. Allen, Chief Inspector for Her Majesty's Schools, toured American schools. In an English Journal interview (May, 1966), Allen criticized Project English on two counts: first, that it turned its back on the student and second, that it seemed too violent a reaction against John Dewey and progressive education; further, that literature and language could not be sequenced like science, and that any attempts to do so were based on illusory hope. In effect, he felt the materials were unteachable.

In 1966, certain participants at the controversial Dartmouth Conference took exception to Project English. One delegate is reputed to have "plucked off a page of junior high Project English materials" and "said in the meticulous accents of his controlled rage . . . 'I would not carry this material into my classroom at any level of the curriculum. It represents an affront to the mind and an insult to the imagination; it is beneath contempt and beyond discussion.'"

In 1966, 1967, and 1968, English Journal reviews of Project English materials tended to be far from glowing. Concerns were legion. Some materials avoided instruction in oral communication and speech skills; others failed to stimulate student creativity. More emphasis needed to be placed on inquiry. One critic went so far as to stigmatize the materials as "Grandmother's eleven kinds of vitamin pills." Perhaps most devastating

was the assertion that "the new English" wasn't really new after all, but merely a rehash of past beliefs.

The Changing Educational Structure

Between 1961 and 1968, the country experienced devastating changes. In the December 26, 1968 issue of Life, editors attempted to explain the decade as having two moods: first, an optimism that swelled into demands for extreme and immediate change; second, a violent explosion over race, youth, life-styles, and war. Just as citizens were questioning the authority of government, children were questioning the authority of adults. In asserting liberation, children occasionally forced adults to capitulate. The process was facilitated by a series of court decisions that reinforced the child's "bill of rights."

As in all ages of social change, education changed. Campus disorders, beginning on university campuses then moving down to high schools and junior high schools, told teachers that students were making demands that had to be met--demands for free speech, for freedom of dress, for participation in the curriculum process. Although it becomes cliche to associate students of the 1960s with demands, with drugs, with individualized style, and with social consciousness, the fact remains that seven years of war and social upheaval had changed the nature of students: in simplistic terms, the generation gap and the spiral curriculum couldn't co-exist.

In addition to the more sensational aspects of the 1960s, education was responding to more peaceful agents of change. Dwight Burton recounts that while the Florida State Center was defining a program for the junior high school, another Florida conference was trying to replace the junior high

school with the middle school. While English programs were being developed for the traditional classroom predetermined by the Carnegie-unit, other educators were busy eliminating "bells and cells" and experimenting with modular scheduling, upgraded programs, electives, individualized instruction, independent study, and "packaged" programs.

Dealing with Masses of Teachers

Although large numbers of teachers were involved at the various Centers, evidence suggests that the efforts of Project English were largely unknown. In a June 8, 1971 letter to me, George Allen noted that the individual projects were not aware, even of one another, and that there appeared no one willing to establish productive communication. He recounts that while visiting Centers, he was surprised how "University A could be quite interested in what was happening at University B, since the published statements and prospectuses of projects were not really very formative."

A sample of 25 courses of study published during the period of 1961 to 1970 reveals only one vague reference to "new federal or state programs." Ironically, some of these documents were prepared in states containing Project English Centers.

In the May, 1978 issue of Research in the Teaching of English, Roy O'Donnell lamented the traditional disregard of research in program planning and implementation. His statement caused me to reflect on my own experience as a high school English teacher in the 1960s. Would, I wondered, Project English have revolutionized my teaching had there been no Dartmouth Conference, had there been no campus disorders, no Viet Nam War? Had there been a Project English Center nearby--in Stockton, California rather than so far away in

Oregon--might I have availed myself of its riches? As one who now advocates to students the necessity of being on the "cutting edge" of experimentation and innovation, I don't want to explore these questions--for obvious reasons.

And Who Cared?

Project English--its conception, its birth, its life, its death. And who cared?

Those who participated cared. After the contracts expired, after the materials were processed, the memories of the experience remained. In an issue of Breakthrough English No. 3, Paul Olson cited four longlasting benefits of the curriculum movement of the 1960s, especially Project English: (1) public school awareness of transformational and structural grammar, (2) the development of a new rhetoric, (3) a serious study of children's literature, (4) the process of involving university scholars, education professors, and classroom teachers in combined efforts to solve educational problems. Echoing Olson, Erwin Steinberg, in a discussion with Stanford graduate students on April 13, 1971, added, that Project English made curriculum designers look to the classroom for cues to motivating student performance and become more aware of growth and development patterns through the work of Piaget and Bruner. Continuing, Steinberg, felt that English educators were becoming more precise about evaluation of curricula. Then, I remember writing word for word one statement he made: "We learned there are no definitive answers and that was great . . . Let's write curriculum every five years."

Looking back, both Albert Kitzhaber and Marjorie Smiley maintained that if they had it to do all over again they would proceed in the same way. Kitzhaber, for example, believes Project English (1) brought scholarship to

bear on the curriculum, (2) brought schools and colleges together for improved communication, (3) brought order and sequence to the English curriculum, and (4) defined English "so as to clear it from the encrustations that had covered it nearly to the point of concealment during the years of Progressive Education." Marjorie Smiley felt that the Hunter Project had highlighted culturally relevant literature, including that by minority writers, detailed planning, and integration of A-V materials.

In addition to the participants, students of curriculum and educational history care because Project English represents a noble experiment that can provide insight into the solution of educational problems today and tomorrow.

Even those classroom teachers who, like me, didn't know Project English existed, care. Not only did the Project make available innovative methods and materials, but its existence posed disturbing questions with which we all must deal: What is the nature of knowledge? How does one learn?

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